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ABSTRACT

Visits to 10 schools and residential centers in eight countries were made to investigate international applications of ecological models in the psychoeducational treatment of behavior disordered children. The ecological approach differs from other approaches because it views the problem as a disturbance in the relationship and reciprocity between the child and his or her environment. Each of the 10 programs is briefly described. Seven conclusions are presented, including that ecological approaches place much emphasis on providing a rich and multifaceted therapeutic milieu for the students; that the ecological models combine with and strengthen other approaches easily and effectively; and that research on program effectiveness is very limited. (CL)

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International Applications of Ecological Models: Implications for the Future

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The ecological model has emerged as perhaps the most viable of the intervention strategies in current use in the therapeutic education of children with behavior disorders. The idea that a change in the environment and particularly in the educational setting might lead to improvement in the behavior and adjustment of children is certainly not new. Ecological concepts were basic to Rousseau's "back to nature" movement and in the blue print for a new education he presented with the publication of Emile in 1764. These ideas were put into effective practice when Pestalozzi in 1798 established in Switzerland his first school and home for children made destitute as a result of the ravages of the Napoleonic Wars.

However, a clear and succinct formulation of ecological theories in the education of children with problems did not occur until William Rhodes in the early 1970's published several articles on the subjects. They were further elaborated upon in the proceedings of his Conceptual Project in Emotional Disturbance.

A particular strength of the ecological model is the ease with which it can combine with or incorporate other remediation approaches to make for even more effective interventions. Susan Swap has shown its workable relationship with the developmental model, and Jeannine Guindon has demonstrated its usefulness when combined with psychodynamic, and more particularly psychoanalytic, procedures. In recent years the Re-Ed program in Tennessee, which has essentially an ecological approach, has

been greatly influenced by behavior modification. At the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, some programs which are counter-culture or transcendental in nature, have strong ecological features. A natural relationship also exists with the medical model, particularly when it comes to health care and nutrition.

Briefly stated, the major strategies in current use are the child development, psychodynamic, learning disabilities, behavior modification, medical ecological, counter-culture, and the psychoeducational models. Of these, the first five tend to see the origin of the disturbance in some deficiency within the child which has to be alleviated. With some simplification, these five models view the causes of behavior disorders respectively as inadequate early childhood experiences, inner emotional conflicts, malfunctioning of the brain's information processing, faulty learning, or some organic illness requiring medically oriented intervention. The ecological approach defines the problem as a disturbance in the relationship and reciprocity between the child and his environment. The counter-culture theorists go one step further and place the burden of guilt on the environment, whether it be the family, the school, the social and economic structures, or the moral and ethical value systems. The psychoeducational model is in some ways an eclectic synthesis of the other strategies.

This writer proposes to add another intervention method called the transcendental model. It fits an increasing number

of therapeutic communities in which a central tenet is a belief in the spiritual and even mystical nature of the human personality.

During the past several years I have had the privilege of visiting a number of schools and other therapeutic facilities for behavior disordered children both in Europe and North America. For this presentation I have selected ten centers in eight countries. They all have in common a clear commitment to provide for the children a therapeutic and healing environment. Apart from this, they are all very different from each other.

Specific Programs

1. Stadtzurcherisches Schulerheim Heimgarten is a residential school for emotionally disturbed mildly retarded boys and girls in the age range from 7 to 16. The center is run by the city of Zurich and accommodates a maximum of 54 children. It is situated in the country near a small town 30 miles from Zurich. The children live family style in six modern spacious homes. The theoretical basis for the reeducation program is mostly derived from the developmental theories of Paul Moor who again is a philisophical descendant of Pestalozzi. The transcendental ideas of Rudolf Steiner have also been influential.

The curriculum is many-sided and attempts to educate "the head, the hand, and the heart." There is much emphasis on practical and manual skills and activities that may be used in ordinary life adjustment, gardening, physical education and

sports, the arts, cultural events, and the development of a moral personality. The close and enduring relationship with a stable and outstanding staff is pivotal in the reeducation process.

2. The Varna Public School in Norway was established in 1907 as a residential treatment facility for delinquent and otherwise difficult boys. The school has presently 40 children of elementary school age.

The founder of the school conceived himself as a Norwegian Pestalozzi, and the present director shares his views about the kind of community he wants to maintain. Because of their therapeutic value, much attention is given to the non-academic subjects such as dramatics, music, singing, painting, and other formative arts. Sports and physical education play an important part, as do club activities of various kinds. A special feature is a "hut city," a group of huts in the forest that the children themselves have built and furnished. The teachers all have advanced training in special education. The classes are small and seldom have more than four pupils. There is much individual instruction. Close contact is kept with the parents and the school from which the children were referred.

3. Le Centre d'Orientation in Montreal, Canada, is a private residential school for about 20 intellectually gifted but seriously emotionally disturbed boys. The children stay for at least three years. The school consists of a large family dwelling in a residential neighborhood.

The basic treatment strategy is clearly psychodynamic - or more specifically psychoanalytic - and has been greatly influenced by the milieu therapy approaches of Fritz Redl and Bruno Bettelheim. There is also a strong developmental emphasis, and both therapy and education have been fashioned in conformity with the theories of Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget.

The central person in the treatment program is the psychoeducator, a new type of professional who serves both the roles of teacher and milieu therapist. One of the psychoeducators, Pierre Girouard, has developed an approach of teaching history as a therapeutic medium. In the course of the school year, the class covers tha main historical stages. The pupils recreate each period in music, drama, and art, including work in clay. At the end, the children see their own lives in historical perspectives, and they begin to formulate their own destinies as carriers of a cultural heritage into the future.

4. Witherslack Hall is a group of three residential schools near Lake Windermere in the scenic Lake District in northern England. Two of the schools were previously boarding schools for British upper class children. Presently the pupils are referred from the local educational agencies. The owners, John and Vera Horner, are committed to the philosophy that the schools should provide the kinds of relationships and experiences caring parents would give their children. Teachers and house parents are carefully selected on the basis of their personal qualities. There are many outdoor activities including wilderness camping

and sailing. In an exchange program with a similar Swiss school, the children have been able to spend a vacation in Switzerland. The teaching staff has received inservice training as educators from an American professor. Extensive parent counseling is provided based on the therapeutic principles of Virginia Satir.

5. Skovmarkskolen is a day school for 25 boys near Copenhagen, Denmark. The building was originally a farm house and has been well adapted to its present purpose. The school has rooms for metal, wood, and leather work, and painting. There is additionally a large workshop area where the children, among other things, repair bicycles and build their own canoes. On the outside there is a large "Junkyard" playground, a uniquely Danish invention.

During the first three months of their stay, the children are picked up in the morning by their teachers. The school is closed only during the month of July. During the rest of the summer, on Saturdays and on holidays, the teachers work with the children in informal and enriching activities.

6. The Edgewood Children's Center in Webster Groves, Missouri, U.S.A. is a multi-service treatment facility for emotionally disturbed pre-adolescent children. About 30 of the children are in residential treatment, and about half that number are in day care.

The total program has an ecological approach and attempts both to teach the children adaptive skills and to make the family and the community more responsive to the needs of the troubled

child. A special feature are the so-called "Educational Therapy" classrooms which involve some but not all of the school population. The E-T program is a modified version of the Re-Ed model in Tennessee. The teachers and social workers committed to this approach work closely together and share both the teaching and the social work responsibilities. They have also been able to form man-woman teams giving many children for the first time the experience of a mature couple caring for their needs. Another innovation is the daily "pow-wow" at the start and the end of the day in which the pupils and the staff form a circle on the floor to plan together or to discuss their problems. The children also go wilderness camping, and some have been back-packing in the Rocky Mountains. This approach has led to much improvement both in social and academic behavior.

6. Barnbyn Ska is a therapeutic village near Stockholm in Sweden. It was established in 1947 to serve emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted children. The architecture is a striking example of the Swedish concept of normalization. The buildings blend inconspicuously into the rustic surroundings without a trace of their institutional nature.

The treatment models have changed over the years from psychodynamic and ecological approaches in the direction of counter-culture strategies.

The village at present has about 100 inhabitants evenly divided between staff and clients with their families. The professional staff has a strong socialistic orientation.

The clients are perceived as victims of a social and economic system which has led to their isolation and despair. In the village attempts are made to break the vicious social heritage and to re-establish a sense of community through participatory democracy. On their return home, the clients also benefit from "at home" therapy. Members of the staff stay with them and help them to deal more efficiently with the problems of daily living even to the extent of political activism.

7. Sogn Skole is the educational section of the Adolescent Clinic at the Norwegian Center for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. The school has a capacity of 60 students at a time. They are either in long term or short term residential care or in day care.

Sogn Skole is an ideal example of the psychoeducational model, since it utilizes all the other models to varying extent. However, the activities and relationships in the school are considered a crucial part of the therapeutic program.

The school is situated in a beautiful setting. The building is modern, beautifully furnished, and with ample space for its many different functions, such as the language laboratory, the carpentry shops, the weaving room, the snack room, student lounges, and the teachers lounge. The court yard has outside panels for artistic creativity. Apartments are available free of charge for parents who come for family therapy.

An outstanding feature is a system of democratic self-government in which students and staff run many aspects of the

school jointly.

8. Fuhrenbuhl Heimsonderschule is a therapeutic or curative school and community for about 100 children near Lake Constance in West Germany. For a majority of the pupils, cerebral palsy is a central problem, but many also have sensory difficulties, mental retardation and psychiatric problems.

The program is based on the anthroposophic principles of Rudolf Steiner. Beliefs in man's essentially spiritual nature and in reincarnation are the cornerstones to treatment. Although the transcendental model is predominant, there are strong elements of developmental, psychodynamic, medical, ecological, and counter-culture strategies. Radical new concepts and designs have been introduced in the architecture which serve both educational and spiritual functions. Music, painting, drama, eurythmy and pre-vocational skills are important parts of the curriculum. A close family and community life, swimming, horseback riding, gardening, and the celebration of the seasons and the holidays are woven into patterns of experiences with which the children are surrounded.

9. St. George Homes is a residential treatment center for 36 autistic and schizophrenic adolescents. They live in several family oriented homes in a residential area in Berkley, California. The professional and paraprofessional staff exceed 90.

The general approach could well be labelled transcendental. The basic language and psychological orientation of this therapeutic community follow the personality theories of Carl Jung.

There is also an active utilization of the ritual and symbolic imagery of the American Indians and the dream processes of the Senoi people. Such diverse approaches as Gestalt therapy, Freudian analysis, Reichian body work, behavior modification, and bio-feedback are also incorporated when appropriate. The symbol of the circle as a healing form dominates in decorations, meal time seating arrangements, religious and spiritual rituals, and in therapy. About 80 percent of the former clients are now living in the community. A number of them have made a very adequate adjustment.

Conclusions:

From the above and other observations of psychoeducational interventions for behavior disordered children on the international scene, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. Ecological strategies have an important place among the treatment models. Particularly in residential settings and day school there is much emphasis on the provision of a rich and multi-faceted therapeutic milieu for the children.
2. The theoretical under-pinnings for ecological interventions seem to have two major strands. Particularly in Central and Northern Europe the idealistic and romantic philosophies of Rousseau and Pestalozzi have had an enduring impact on many programs. The second trend derives to a great extent from modern psychological, sociological, and ethological theory and research.

3. It is striking how easily and effectively the ecological models combine with and strengthen other approaches.

4. There is a definite movement internationally away from child-focused strategies towards an environmental orientation. There are, however, exceptions to this.

5. There is a general concensus that the eventual success of a segregated program is greatly affected by the quality of the support systems in after-care and the planning done for the child's re-integration in a regular setting.

6. Research on program effectiveness is very limited. More informal follow-up studies are generally positive in nature. It is conceded that efficacy studies are fraught with almost insoluble problems.

7. There is in Europe and Canada a greater acceptance than in the United States that the special school has a legitimate place in the spectrum of services. One reason for this is the high professional and human standards maintained in these institutions. Some of these centers seem like truly happy places to be.